

Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. announced his strong opposition to H.R. 3045, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

"I voted against CAFTA because it fails to provide basic protections for workers in Latin America, will lead to the loss of American jobs, damages the environment, undermines public health, and will increase the budget deficit. I encourage free trade, but more importantly, I want fair trade, a trade policy that promotes the free flow of goods while improving the living conditions of people in the United States and abroad. CAFTA does not accomplish this," Jackson said.

"I just couldn't bring myself to vote for a bill that would allow child labor, and would permit workers to earn almost nothing.

Jackson said, "This bill does nothing to protect workers in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. Under this legislation, countries would not need to bring their laws into compliance with International Labor Organization (ILO) core labor standards. CAFTA focuses on the enforcement of weak worker protection laws, instead of raising the standards.

"In many countries that are signatories to CAFTA, citizens have expressed their strong opposition to the actions of their governments." Jackson added. In Costa Rica, over 30,000 protesters stood in the streets demonstrating against CAFTA; more than 8,000 protested against the agreement in Guatemala; and tens of thousands in El Salvador opposed CAFTA while their government passed the bill in the middle of the night.

"One of my top priorities is to produce and keep American jobs," Jackson said. According to a study done by the Economic Policy Institute(EPI), an estimated 879,280 jobs have been lost in the last 10 years. CAFTA's text is 90 percent identical to NAFTA's and will lead to the loss of many American jobs.

" CAFTA is not good for our economy. We're losing jobs at home, and by voting for this bill we're voting against the American people. There is a reason why so many in Central America

and the United States did not want CAFTA to pass. Plain and simple, CAFTA does not promote a better way of life," Jackson concluded.